

# Romantic love and marriage

## A study of age homogamy in 19th century Leuven

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### INTRODUCTION

Many authors have found signs of cultural change affecting marriage and marital life, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the core of this cultural change lies the “*growing intimacy, emotionalism and sentimentalism of family life*” (Mitterauer and Sieder, 1983, 60)<sup>1</sup> – or in one word the romanticisation of family life – and the spread of bourgeois morality. Some implications of these changes for marriage life are: the rise of domesticity, the retreat of wives to the private sphere of life, the importance of kin and the decline of some aspects of community life (for instance the decreasing role of the community in the celebration of marriage). Also partner selection is said to have changed. The idea of the increasing influence of romantic love on the process of partner selection is linked with the theories of Shorter. In his view this romantic ‘outburst’ lead to changes in the homogamy pattern (Shorter, 1975, 154).<sup>2</sup> As romantic love can only grow between people who know each other, and because age peers have more frequent interaction with each other than with older or younger people, romantic love will lead to more marriages between age peers (Shorter, 1975, 154; see also Beekink et al., 1998, 234-235).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These authors situate the beginning of this change in the eighteenth century. As to the timing of cultural change, see section 1.

<sup>2</sup> We distinguish three major visions on the importance of romantic love on the partner selection process in the nineteenth century. The first denies the existence of an increasing importance of romantic love as a partner selection criterion (romantic love being a phenomenon of the twentieth century), although there might be a process of romanticisation of family life. The second vision accepts the growing impact of romantic love and states this is a middle class initiated phenomenon, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century. The third vision postulates that it is a working class initiated change, starting early in the nineteenth century (Shorter).

<sup>3</sup> Shorter also expects a decline of geographical and socio-economic homogamous marriages (Shorter, 1975, 150 et seq.).

The aim of this article is to analyse the evolution of age homogamy in first marriages in nineteenth century Leuven.<sup>4</sup> Leuven is a small city in the province of Brabant (currently Flemish Brabant), in the centre of Belgium. The population of Leuven doubled in the nineteenth century: from 20,000 to 42,000 inhabitants. The Leuven economy was primarily based on trade and services.<sup>5</sup> Starting from three important issues, we evaluate the importance of romantic love but also of other possible determinants of age homogamy. The main focus of our study lies on the differences in age homogamy by occupational category.

## 1. THEORY

### 1.1. Romantic love and age homogamy

First of all, a problem when analysing the evolution of the age gap between spouses is the parallel decrease of the mean age-at-first-marriage and the practical impossibility to marry under a certain age, which both lead to a growing group of potential marriage partners in the same age groups. To some degree, the increase of the proportion of same age marriages is possibly a mechanical consequence of the decreasing age-at-marriage.<sup>6</sup> We will explore this issue in the methodology section.

Secondly, the link between cultural change – the rise of romanticism – and the partner selection process is questionable. Romanticism does not necessarily and directly lead to a different strategy of spouse selection. We have to distinguish between romantic love as a force determining partner selection and romantic love as a characteristic of marriage life (as a type of relation between husband and wife). For this reason, romantic partner selection is not a necessary component of the process of romantisation, but the component which typifies a special version of romanticism (which we can call ‘emancipatory romanticism’, compared with a ‘subordinate’ romanticism).

The increasing influence of romantic love as a feature of husband-wife relations, is part of a broader trend which we have called the romantisation of family life. Following Shorter and others (see for instance Hareven, 1991), the

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<sup>4</sup>. We only use first marriages as we expect that for remarriages age differences might be influenced by other determinants (see also Van Poppel, 1996, 15).

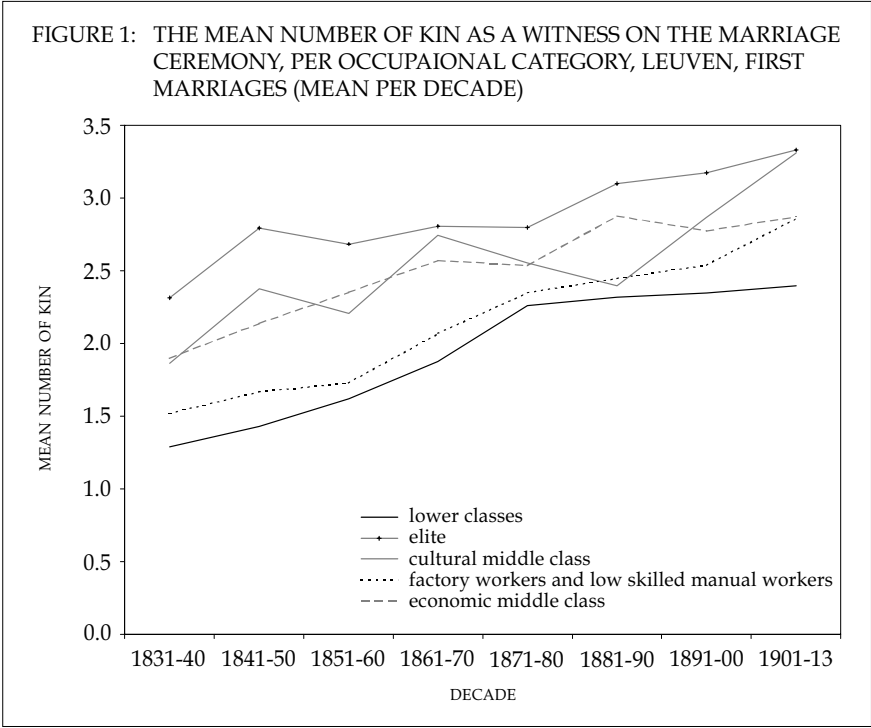
<sup>5</sup>. For more information, see section 2.1.

<sup>6</sup>. For the decline of the age-at-marriage in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Matthijs, 2001, 179.

rise of a modern family which functioned as an emotional haven was a feature of the nineteenth century. For the elite this process may have started earlier (Trumbach, 1978, 287; Stone, 1977, 655).<sup>7</sup> This domesticity strengthened and broke the family's traditional interaction with its immediate environment (Shorter, 1975, 227). This is illustrated by the increasing importance of 'dinner', growing emotional ties between husband and wife and between parent and child,... The process is said to end with the complete retreat of the married couple from the routine activities of community life and in the strengthening of the ties with parents and other close kin (Shorter, 1975). Along with the retreat from community life towards 'home', there was a declining influence of the community on the wedding ceremony (Bulcroft and Bulcroft, 1997). Another important parallel evolution is the exclusion of women out of the public arena (where instrumental roles are to be fulfilled) and their 'confinement' to the nurturing and expressive role, which is a feature specific for the second half of the nineteenth century (Hareven, 1991). The latter evolutions are also present in Leuven. Figure 1 and 2 respectively show the number of kin as a witness to the marriage ceremony and the percentage of non-working brides. Both figures show the cultural change in the second half of nineteenth century Leuven.

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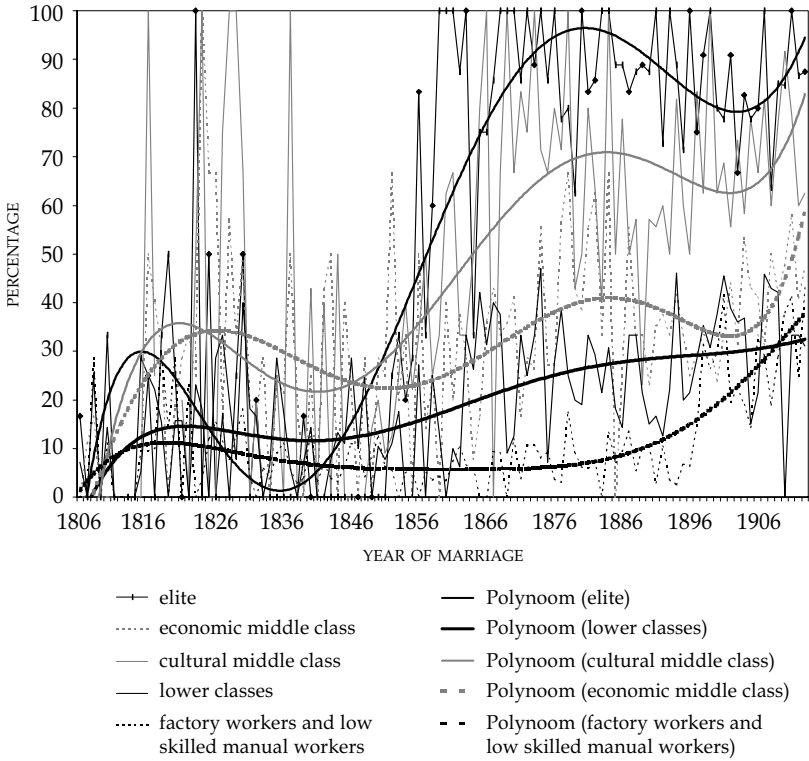
<sup>7</sup>. But, "I wish to give here only a furtive nod at the mid-nineteenth century as the take-off point of worker domesticity" (Shorter, 1975, 227-232).



The question remains whether romantic partner selection also became important in the nineteenth century. Shorter, but also others such as Perrot (1989), expects this to be the case. However, the precise timing of the start of this process is not very clear. *“In the second half of the nineteenth century it is more common that a marriage alliance coincides with love, ... and happiness”* (Perrot, 1989, 118, our translation). For Shorter, the start came earlier: *“At the end of the eighteenth century, young people began paying much more attention to inner feelings than to outward considerations, such as property and parental wishes”* (Shorter, 1975, 79). But, in evaluating the evidence for romantic partner selection, Shorter does not firmly stick to this starting point (Shorter, 1975, 148). The main reason why Shorter dates the start of the ‘romantic revolution’ at the end of the eighteenth century is the rise in the illegitimacy rate at that time. Others however heavily doubt whether the illegitimacy rate is a good indicator of a romantic or sexual revolution (see for instance Scott and Tilly, 1978; Anderson, 1980, 56; Segalen, 1986, 135; Leboutte, 1988, 334).<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, there are also other possible determinants of age homogamy. A variant of the theory of the increasing importance of romantic love for partner selection is the increasing importance of the disciplining initiatives of church and bour-

FIGURE 2: THE PERCENTAGE OF NON-WORKING BRIDES, PER OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY, LEUVEN, 19TH CENTURY, FIRST MARRIAGES



<sup>8</sup>. The statement that romantic love is 'new' can also be doubted. Segalen sees many indications that "love was not an unknown phenomenon in rural society" (Segalen, 1986, 129). Leboutte argues that there was an equilibrium between love and material interests (Leboutte, 1988, 331). At the other hand, one can argue that "the omnipresence of death coloured affective relations, ..., by reducing the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual" (Stone, 1977, 651-652). However, we are not examining the discussion of love before the nineteenth century. Our main question is whether romantic love was of increasing importance as a criterion for partner selection in the nineteenth century, as there are clear signs of cultural change in the nineteenth century, especially in the second half of the century.

geois groups. This can increase age homogamy by pressuring young adults to marry the father or mother of their child, as pre-marital pregnancies mostly occur in relationships between age peers (see sections 1.2.1 and 2.4.1.). Another theory is that age homogamy is more likely to be observed in some social groups as a result of instrumental partner selection or as a consequence of less patriarchal relations between husband and wife. We will address these three alternative determinants of age homogamy in detail.

## 1.2. Other causes of age homogamy

### 1.2.1. *Disciplining of unwed mothers*

Until now, we described the increasing romanticisation of family life as a relatively autonomous process. The other possibility, that of an 'imposed' romanticisation of family life cannot be excluded. Indeed, bourgeois and catholic disciplining strategies focused on marriage life.<sup>9</sup> The disciplining need not necessarily be the consequence of the direct exercising of social control by the clergy, but can be exercised by the parents of the couple.

The bourgeois-catholic disciplining effort can have stimulated same age marriages in an indirect manner.<sup>10</sup> The Church had strong formal scripts for the 'ideal' family (see Servais in this issue). Unwed mothers certainly did not live up to this ideal. Gillis for instance states that in 1900 (as a consequence of a change which originates in the middle decades of the nineteenth century), *"it was no longer possible to separate motherhood and matrimony. The child conceived outside marriage that in earlier generations had been accepted as a 'chancing' was now regarded as a mistake that could and should have been avoided"* (Gillis, 1985, 237).<sup>11</sup> Pressure to prevent or to alter unwed motherhood was the inevitable

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<sup>9</sup> But, the Church did not view the principle of romantic love in itself as valuable: passion and romantic love were not the primordial ingredients of marital happiness (at least for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cloet and Storme, 2000, 21). We could say that the catholic-bourgeois model was in favour of 'domesticity' and 'maternal love' but not necessarily in favour of romantic love. This vision is not new for Catholics. It is consistent with the catholic vision on mate selection in the former centuries (Cloet and Storme, 2000, 19). The emphasis on these values in a familial context and the disciplining zeal are more typical of the second half of the nineteenth century. Especially in Belgium, catholic organisational power was at its strongest during the last decades of the nineteenth century (Billiet, 1988; Art, 1992), giving the clergy a powerful tool for social control.

<sup>10</sup> Apart from the female retreat to the private sphere and the romanticisation of family life, which may be the characteristics of a disciplined family.

<sup>11</sup> See also Flandrin: *"l'Eglise poussait souvent les séducteurs à épouser les filles qu'ils avaient séduites"* (Flandrin, 1976, 213).

consequence of this vision.<sup>12</sup> It is important that even in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when parental control is often said to have loosened, parents pressured their children to marry when the girl was pregnant (or had already given birth to the child) (Tilly and Scott, 1978, 193).<sup>13</sup> Of course, some pregnant girls may have been disappointed at first (Tilly and Scott, 1978, 123), but legitimisation of the child by later marriage was not uncommon.

The chance that an illegitimate child was legitimised at subsequent marriage increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, at least for Leuven (see Matthijs, 2001). This reveals the increasing pressure (and/or willingness) to marry the father or mother of one's child.<sup>14</sup> The increasing pressure on these couples may have caused an increase in same age marriages. Shorter said that one of the reasons for the fact that romantic love connects age peers is their shared life experiences. Daily interactions were more common between age peers.<sup>15</sup> One of these shared activities were probably sexual activities. This makes same age partners more vulnerable to disciplining activities. As the number of illegitimate children and the number of legitimised children is rather high in Leuven (Van de Putte, 2001), the increasing pressure to marry the mother of one's child is an alternative explanation for a rise in same age marriages.

### 1.2.2. Egalitarian relations

Increased age carries with it increased authority (Knodel, 1988, 137). The older husband marriage is therefore said to reflect the power distribution between both partners, as the age gap helps to implement the male dominance. "*A large age gap between spouses has sometimes been viewed as an indicator of the relative power of spouses in marriage*" (McQuillan, 1989, 341). In the more extreme cases,

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<sup>12</sup> Another reason for pressuring the couple to marry, was the 'unlucky' fate of the unwed mother, who was thought to be pitiable (Leboutte, 1988, 399), although this factor must also have existed in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is also possible that the result of this pressure to marry the pregnant girl or unwed mother may have been advanced in the second half of the nineteenth century for instance because of an increasing standard of living (On this topic, see Van Bavel in this issue).

<sup>13</sup> This pressure must be seen in the context of the attitude towards pre-marital sexual relations. These relations were generally tolerated when a future marriage was promised. Furthermore, even in the second half of the nineteenth century, parental control was still strong (Scott and Tilly, 1978, 193), especially in catholic areas (Van Poppel, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> The degree in which the parents of an illegitimate child marry, is sometimes seen as and indicator of the efficiency of social control (Kälveborn, 1980, 334).

<sup>15</sup> Of course, social class may also explain one's chances to become an unwed mother.

*"the difference in age arising from frequent remarriage may have contributed to greater dependence, at any rate in those marriages in which the man was considerably older than the woman"* (Mitterauer and Sieder, 1983, 65). Some suggest that in these marriages *"the wife was then treated almost as a child and that in those places where patriarchal structures were dominant, the husband usually was much older than his wife"* (Mitterauer and Sieder, 1983, 65-66; for a similar argument on patriarchy and younger spouses see Schlumbohm, 1991, 596). Older wife marriages and smaller age gaps between spouses may reflect the less 'advantageous' – for men – power distribution. In short, *"near equality in ages of the spouses favours a partnership relationship"* (Mitterauer and Sieder, 1983, 65). Relationships which have some egalitarian characteristics may have been present in the nineteenth century. This egalitarianism can for instance stem from the female contribution in the family income.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.2.3. Age homogamy as a consequence of instrumental partner selection

We have to distinguish between the preference for a specific age relationship between marriage partners (for instance preference for a same age partner) and the preference for a marriage partner of a specific age (for instance preference for a partner who is old enough). Romantic love and patriarchy are concepts which are mainly related with the preference for a specific age relationship. Commonly, spouses also have a preference for partners of a specific age. This might be caused by the preference for the characteristics which are linked with a specific age, for instance the wealth of an old men and the beauty of a young woman. Even if there is no preference for a certain age gap or for a type of marriage (older husband, same age or older wife marriage), the distribution of the age at marriage – which is determined by the preference for the partner's age-at-marriage and for one's own age-at-marriage – will cause a specific distribution of marriage types. Therefore older husband marriages may also have been rooted in the sex-specific timing of marriage. Indeed, it is mainly men who have to wait longer to marry since they need to be able to guarantee income security (and for instance wait until a farm is available). *"Men's socio-economic resources, income and social standing in particular, generally increased with age. Therefore, females had ample reason not to marry young males"* (Van Poppel et al., 1998, 78, our translation). This is less the case for women.

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<sup>16</sup>. Although the female financial contribution will of course not be a guarantee for equality in husband-wife power relationship. See for instance Stone, 1977, 654-5.



*"The main socio-economic resources a woman brought to the marriage market were related to her capacity to perform domestic labor. ... Other important resources, such as energy and good health, to be used in help with harvesting, giving birth to and rearing children, were highest at relatively young ages"* (Van Poppel et al., 1998, 78, our translation). For these reasons, matching labour market skills of males with domestic skills of females lead to an age gap in favour of males. However, this situation may differ by occupational group. For some social groups instrumental evaluations may cause age homogamy.

### 1.3. Age homogamy by occupational category

As each social group may experience different societal constraints, the four mentioned paths towards age homogamy (romantic love, disciplining, egalitarian relations, instrumental surplus value of specific ages) will lead to differences in age gaps by social group. We distinguish between three broad occupational groups (elite, middle class, lower class), which we divided in some subgroups (see section 2.6 for classification principles). Per group we evaluate the most important determinants of age homogamy.

Some authors state that for the *elite* the increasing importance of a romantic attitude really broke through in the second half of the eighteenth century (see Spierenburg, 1989, 616). However, it is doubtful that romantic love really did determine partner selection of the elite. Firstly, they are the group with the greatest risks for misalliances. The presence of property is a strong incentive for parents to carefully monitor the preservation of the patrimony (Van Poppel, 1998, 85; for a similar argumentation see Stone, 1977, 303). Secondly, their conservative traits and their probable adherence (to the norms) of the catholic church (at least in Leuven, see Matthijs and Van de Putte, 2001), are not characteristics which stimulated romantic partner selection.

The older husband marriage seems to have been deeply rooted in this social group. Instrumental economic reasons were an important factor (Beekink et al., 1998, 235). For upper class males, *"higher level careers often involved a long period of educational preparation and training and men's income and social standing in the upper class generally went up slowly with age. Interest thus focused here on older husbands who had already shown suitability"* (Van Poppel et al., 1998, 83, our translation). Upper class women did not have to wait long in order to get married, as experience in domestic work nor wage earning capacity was important. Moreover, it was mainly the married bourgeois wife who was in a dependent position (Verwey-Jonker, 1985, 152). For instance these elite brides less frequently had a job. This fact was not be favourable to their power position towards their husbands. This dependent position was rooted in a pat-

riarchal culture (Gillis, 1985, 187). This leads to the conclusion that “*in the upper class, age superiority of the husband was valued higher than elsewhere*” (Van Poppel et al., 1998, 84, our translation). Altogether, it is our view that the elite follows a model of marriage with male dominance, resulting in a high level of older husband marriages. We do not expect an increasing level of same age marriages during the course of the nineteenth century, but an increasing tendency for domesticity and more generally for romanticisation of family life, as this is a less dangerous form of romanticism, is more probable.

The domestic ideal of a ‘male breadwinner supporting his dependent wife and children with his earnings’ is sometimes seen as a typical *middle class* ideal, although of course also other classes might be inspired by it (Perrot, 1989, 121; Van den Eeckhout, 1993). This domestic ideal focuses on the labour distribution in the family. Some information also suggests that middle class couples not only followed the domestic ideal of labour distribution, but that among these couples the romanticisation of marriage life was an important force. It is for instance mainly in the middle classes that some authors situate the companionate marital ideal, which focuses on the personal (sexual) relations between husband and wife. This ideal is characterised by considerate husbands and sexually satisfied wives, while the opposite, the patriarchal model, is characterised by demanding husbands who subject their “*passionless wives to a continual grind of emotional and sexual brutalisation*” (Battan, 1999, 165).<sup>17</sup>

These visions on middle class marital life can be interpreted in both an emancipatory or a subordinate perspective. The ideal of the male breadwinner shows the dependency of the wife, while the companionate ideal shows the wives’ sexual emancipation. Furthermore, the attachment to the domestic ideal and the romanticisation of family life, does not necessarily mean that romantic love determined partner selection. There are however some indications that the romanticisation of middle class family life was not only a feature of life after marriage. Some suggest that these marriages probably started from the very beginning in a romantic atmosphere. An illustration of this is the increasing desire of these couples to go on a ‘private’ honeymoon from the middle of the nineteenth century, at least in the United States (Bulcroft and Bulcroft, 1997). These authors think that the increased reliance on romantic love as the foundation of marriage was the cause of this honeymoon behaviour. Moreover, the middle class had the cultural capital and the ‘economic liberty’<sup>18</sup> to be involved in romantic partner selection (for a similar argumentation, see Stone, 1977, 666).

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<sup>17.</sup> Of course, these types are only caricatures.

<sup>18.</sup> In the sense that they are not overly preoccupied with daily survival.

In the perspective of the importance of cultural capital, we think there will be a difference between school-educated middle class groups (teachers, civil servants, etc., which we will call 'cultural middle class') and craftsmen and the like (which we will call 'economic middle class'). It is our opinion that the middle class group with cultural capital has more affinity with romanticism. Their background brings them in more frequent contact with the expression of the romantic ideal in literature, theatre etc. (see for instance Hareven, 1991; De Giorgio, 1993, 136) The economic middle class is more likely to show a pattern more similar to that of the lower classes.

Some authors state that the *lower classes* had a loving marriage life long before the eighteenth century and that partner selection in that period was based on personal attraction (Spierenburg, 1989, 616). In this view, lower classes were more free to choose the 'ideal' partner – from a romantic point of view. An argument for this opinion is that lower classes have less material interest in spouse selection, as they do not have much property to lose. Shorter however disagrees with the vision that lower class spouses did not have instrumental selection criterions. Also in lower classes (at least on the countryside) more materialistic evaluations were important (Shorter, 1975, 146; see also Stone, 1977, 193 for the sixteenth and seventeenth century).<sup>19</sup> Whatever the situation was before the nineteenth century, the question which matters here is whether romantic love is an important force determining partner selection in the nineteenth century. On this topic too there is disagreement. Shorter states that the lower classes were the pioneers of romantic partner selection, and romantic partner selection was already important in the first half of the nineteenth century (Shorter, 1975, 148-149 and 228). It is suggested that the wage economy enhanced the freedom of choice in partner selection. This view is sometimes criticised: *"The assumption that marriage involved the union of two wage-earning capacities, the fact that in any event wage-earning couples brought no endowment to their marriages, meant a greater emphasis on personal attraction and a lessening of the importance of the material resources one brought to a union. This does not mean, however, as Edward Shorter has suggested, that individual emotional considerations completely overcame 'instrumental' attitudes toward sex and marriage"* (Tilly and Scott, 1978, 191). The point here is that the new standards of partner selection, the behaviour and the looks of an individual, were used in an instrumental way, namely in helping to select a *"mate who would help support and maintain a family"* (Tilly and Scott, 1978, 191).

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<sup>19</sup> There seems to be some agreement on the fact that between 1750 and 1850 partner selection of the lower classes was rather unfree (Spierenburg, 1989, 616) – although Shorter may disagree with the timing of the end of the period.

Some authors think that real romantic partner selection per se was too idealistic to be applicable in the hard living conditions of the lower classes. *"A collective view of familial obligations was the very basis of survival. From such a perspective, marriage and parenthood were not merely love relationships, but partnerships governed by family economic and social needs. In this respect the experience of nineteenth-century working-class families and of ethnic families in the more recent past was drastically different from that of middle-classes, in which sentimentality emerged as the dominant base of family relationships"* (Hareven, 1989, 48; see also Stone, 1977, 655). This vision can be illustrated by the absence of 'privacy' for lower class groups. *"For working class families the home was not merely a private refuge; it was a resource that could be used for negating extra income, for paying debts, for staying out of poverty, and for maintaining autonomy in old age. ... Privacy was less important than the flexible use of household space"* (Hareven, 1991, 274). As we may assume that romantic love demands privacy,<sup>20</sup> this seems an important argument against the view of the lower class-groups as the pioneers of romantic partner selection. The statement that the lower classes were the pioneers of conjugal love is also questioned by Gillis (1985, 232 et seq.). Altogether, we think that the lower class vision on marriage and partner selection is the opposite of the middle class vision.

The dubitable importance of romantic love for partner selection does not exclude the importance of other determinants of age homogamy. It cannot be excluded that disciplining efforts had some effects. This factor may be important for the lower classes as these groups have a higher illegitimacy rate (see Van Bavel, 2001 and in this issue). Gillis already developed this idea of the combination of the absence of romantic love and the pressure to conform to other aspects of the family ideal: *"But for all its outward appearance of conformity to the norms of the nuclear family and monogamous marriage, the working-class conjugal relationship itself lacked the prescribed element of companionate intimacy. ... this long era of mandatory matrimony had utterly failed to transform the myth of conjugal love into lived reality as far as ordinary people were concerned"* (Gillis, 1985, 259).

Furthermore, we expect that male dominance will be less strong in lower class relations compared to other social groups. As husbands were less able to bring comfort and some wealth to the family, this must have weakened their position. Depending on the wage level of the husband, lower class women did more frequently have a job and contributed more substantially to the 'family wealth' (Van den Eeckhout, 1993). For this reason, the percentage of

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<sup>20</sup>. See for instance Shorter, 1975, 149: *"privacy – seclusion from curious eyes – was needed for experimentation and innovation in hand-holding and the other games of love"*.

same age marriages and even older woman marriages were rather high even before the second half of the nineteenth century. The relatively weak preference for older husband marriages may also be induced by instrumental reasons. For lower class husbands for instance, wages did often not increase with age, hence the postponement of marriage was not useful (Van Poppel, 1998). Other authors, however, think that especially because of their low income, these men had to wait until they had saved enough money (see for instance Knodel, 1988, 136). There is more agreement concerning the women. The instrumental surplus value of lower class women increased with age as these women could use some postponement of marriage for gathering savings, for instance as a servant. Older women had had the time to save some money.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.4. Hypotheses

Although there are clear signs of cultural change in nineteenth century Leuven (see *supra* and Van de Putte, 2001), we are not convinced that romantic love became a major force determining partner selection. Some groups however, especially the cultural middle class, may have been touched by it. Other middle class groups such as artisans are more likely to have lived a 'lower class' pattern. We do not expect that the lower classes experienced an increase in romantic love in nineteenth century Leuven. The stronger position of the wives in this social group may enhance same age marriages well before the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover it is possible that the bourgeois and catholic disciplining strategies of avoiding illegitimate children caused the rise of same age marriages. Elite groups are expected to behave in a more conservative way. Romantic partner selection threatens their material interests too much to be a realistic option.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

We have used the level of age homogamy as an indicator of the influence of romantic love on the partner selection process. There are two major problems. Firstly, measuring the level of age homogamy is hindered by the declining age-at-marriage. Secondly, it is difficult to assess the strength of each possible cause of age homogamy. We will address these topics in this section. Furthermore, we present the other variables (occupational category) and the data used in this paper. We start with a short description of nineteenth century Leuven.

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<sup>21</sup>. For age gaps in rural communities, see for instance Schlumbohm, 1991, 595.

## 2.1. Leuven in the nineteenth century

The Leuven economy was primarily based on trade and services. In the middle of the nineteenth century, 45 per cent of the economically active population was employed in the sectors of (retail) trade, transport and services. The growth of the service sector was caused by the expansion of the university, city administration, military, schools, courts, prisons, hospitals,... The commercial activities were stimulated by the excellent traffic infrastructure to and from Leuven (for instance railway-connections since 1837). Most industrial activity was organised in small-scale enterprises with one master and some journeymen. Important branches were: food industry (especially brewery activities, with the brewery of L. Artois as a famous example), linen-weaving-mills, blue dye-houses and bleacheries. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the city attracted more large-scale industrial activity. Examples are the railway workshops and metallurgic industries, although the city never became an industrial centre.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2. Data

For this research we used the marriage certificates of the registers of the Civil Registration (1800-1913). It contains data on the marriage itself, some demographic history of the spouses (and their parents), their occupation, their place of residence, name and date of birth of (possible) legitimised children,... Marriage certificates are available for the entire nineteenth century. They have a uniform lay out, are mostly legible and accurately filled in. One out of three marriage certificates were coded, making a total amount of 9,330.

## 2.3. Measuring age homogamy

So far we did not go into the relation between age homogamy and the declining mean age-at-marriage. This topic is the main issue of this section. First of all, we give a short note on the dependent variable in our analysis, namely the type of marriage.

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<sup>22</sup>. For more information on Leuven, see Matthijs et al., 1997 and Matthijs, 2001.

### *2.3.1. Marriage types*

We distinguish between three types:

- same age marriages (sam)
- older husband marriages (ohm)
- older wife marriages (owm)

When the age difference between husband and wife is lower than two years, we consider them to be of the same age category. An older husband marriage is defined as a marriage in which the husband is at least two years older than his wife. An older wife marriage is defined as a marriage in which the wife is at least two years older than her husband. The definition of a same age marriage as a marriage between spouses with a maximum age difference of only two years, will make our test of the increase of same age marriages rather severe. But using this criterion does not make marrying a same age partner unattainable. As a consequence of the use of this criterion, a moderate decline of the age difference between spouses, say from five to three years, will be left unnoticed.

With the use of the type of marriage we reduce the age gap to a 'qualitative' phenomenon. There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, the purely quantitative measurement of the age gap (in years) has the drawback that it also has to distinguish between older husband and older wife marriages. Otherwise the measurement of the age gap will be very misleading. But even if both types of marriages are distinguished, the measurement will still be misleading. If for instance the mean age gap between men and women decreases from 3 to 2 years, this does not necessarily mean that there are more same age marriages. It is possible that this decrease only points at a decreasing age gap in the marriages with very large age gaps (for instance: the disappearance of marriages with a 15 years age gap). Furthermore, the definition of the age gap as a qualitative characteristic better suits the method used for controlling for the age distribution of the spouses.

### *2.3.2. The relation between the age-at-marriage and the age gap*

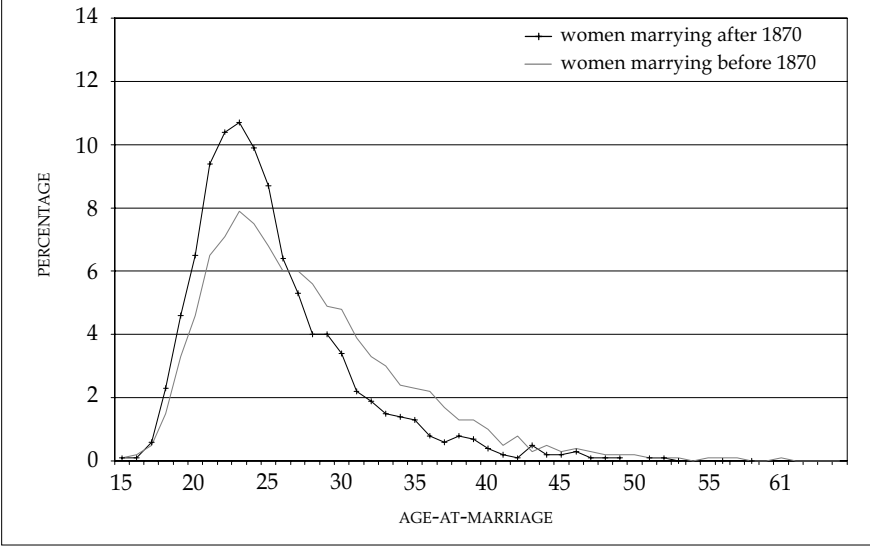
The age distribution of spouses is an important factor when measuring age homogamy, as this distribution determines the number of potential spouses in each age category. The mean age-at-marriage and the dispersion determine the age distribution. If men for whatever reason start to marry early and within a short time span, say between the age of 22 and 26, then the 24-years old women can choose their spouses in a larger group of potential spouses. An important fact is that a decline of the mean age-at-marriage almost

automatically coincides with a declining dispersion. This is caused by the fact that the age-at-marriage cannot decrease below a certain age limit, below which marrying is very unlikely. The age limit for marrying causes a decrease in the dispersion of the age-at-marriage. Instead of an evolution in which the curve of the age distribution of the spouses moves to the left keeping its original form, the curve gets a smaller basis and a higher peak. The compression of marriages between age 20 and 28 is illustrated in figure 3 and 4. In this scenario, the chance of marrying a same age partner increases because of the changed age distribution of men and women entering the marriage market. It is precisely this scenario which takes place in the second half of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the historical decline of the mean age-at-marriage.





FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF THE AGE-AT-MARRIAGE BEFORE AND AFTER 1870, WOMEN, FIRST MARRIAGES, LEUVEN

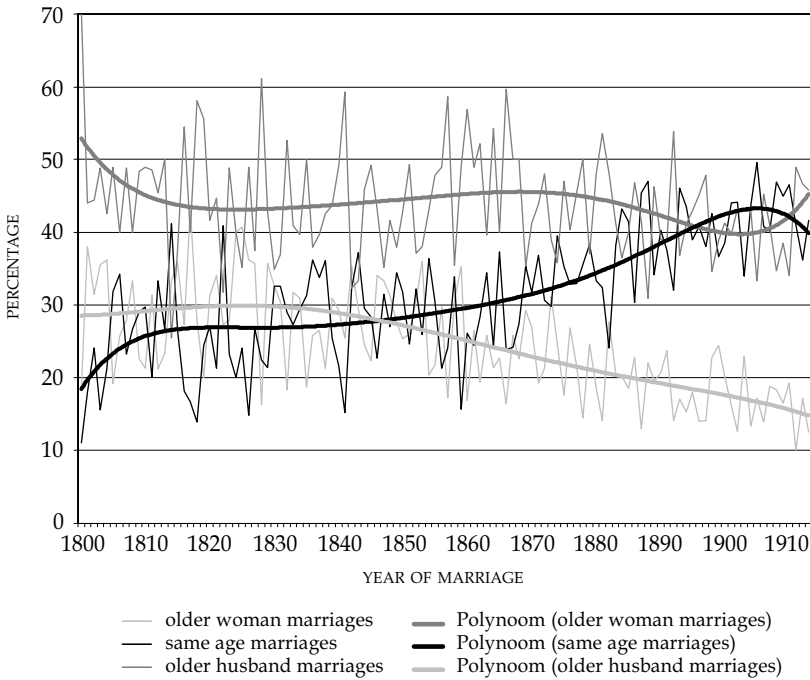


The consequences of this compression for the evolution of age homogamy are clear. Figure 5 shows the percentage of marriages of each type in Leuven. As expected, the percentage of same age marriages increases in the second half of the century. The timing of the increase of the same age marriages is parallel with the decline of the age-at-marriage.

Obviously, this observation gives rise to some interpretational problems. The rise of same age marriages seems to be a mechanical consequence of the declining mean age-at-marriage. But the problem is even more complex. It cannot be excluded that the decrease of the mean age-at-marriage and the dispersion not only gives more occasion to marry a same age partner, but also that the decrease of these parameters themselves is (partly) caused by the increasing desire of the spouses to marry a same age partner (at a young age), thus by romantic love.

Therefore, the main question is whether the evolution of the age-at-marriage is independent of the determinants of the age gap between spouses. In other words, whether these two variables (age gap and age-at-marriage) are determined by the same or by different factors. Say, for analytical reasons, that these variables have the same determinants. For instance, the cultural

FIGURE 5: THE PERCENTAGE OF OLDER HUSBAND MARRIAGES, SAME AGE MARRIAGES AND OLDER WOMAN MARRIAGES, LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES, 1800-1913 (5-YEAR MOVING AVERAGE)



changes which prescribe romantic love as the basis of mate selection also cause the decrease of age-at-marriage. A possible scenario could be that romantic love leads to a higher number of same age marriages. In same age marriages, it is more likely that young couples are involved. Indeed, romantic love is urgent and ‘impatient’ and pressures the same age bride and groom to marry. So, when in the second half of the nineteenth century romantic love gains strength, this leads to more same age marriages and consequently to a decline in the mean age-at-marriage. This is not an improbable scenario. The decrease of the age-at-marriage is sometimes seen as the consequence of the mainly female search to marry a younger and more desirable partner, instead of marrying an old fellow (Perrot, 1989, 118). *If* the evolution of the decreasing mean age-at-marriage and dispersion is linked with romantic values, then the increase of the number of potential same age partners itself is the genuine proof of the preference to marry same age partners. *If not*, then the proof of this hypothesis lies in the increase of same age marriages controlling for the number of potential marriage partners in the different age categories. As it is likely

that the age gap and the age-at-marriage are – at least partly – determined by different factors, we have to control for the number of potential same age partners. A possible scenario in this case is for instance that the age-at-marriage is determined by economic factors (see for instance Van Poppel and Nelissen, 1999) and the age gap by cultural factors.

We want to describe the problem in more general terms. *The observed percentages of older husband marriages, older wife marriages and same age marriages show the preference for each type of marriage only if we are sure that the age distribution of men and women at marriage is totally determined by this preference.* This is a variant of the argument which says that everybody is free to marry at the age he or she wants, and that the material obstacles can always be overcome. However, if there is a neutral age gap preference, then the distribution of the marriages over the three types will simply be the consequence of the different timing of entry in marriage. Conclusions from these percentages will lead to misleading interpretations, namely to the overestimation of the preference for same age partners in the second half of the nineteenth century. The declining age-at-marriage will lead to an increase in same age marriages also if the preference to marry age peers is neutral.

*The controlled<sup>23</sup> percentages of older husband marriages, older wife marriages and same age marriages show the preference for each type of marriage only if we are sure that the age distribution of men and women at marriage is totally undetermined by this preference.* But, as it is reasonable to assume that these age distributions will be determined to some degree by factors such as patriarchal values and romantic love, this strategy will probably lead to misleading interpretations as well, as we will for instance underestimate the preference for same age marriages – given a certain influence of romantic love on the age-at-marriage.

This means that both strategies can easily lead to misinterpretations. In order to avoid this, we will use the following – severe – rule. We only accept the preference for a certain type of marriage as proven, if both the observed and the controlled percentage lead to the same conclusion. So, we only accept the existence of an increasing preference for same age marriages in the second half of the nineteenth century if both the observed percentage of same age marriages and the controlled percentage rise.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>. With this we mean percentages which take the number of available partners into account.

<sup>24</sup>. If the sam-index does not rise, then there may be a rise in preference for same age partners, but we will not be able to prove it.

### 2.3.3. *Measuring the influence of the availability of marriage partners: sam-, ohm-, and owm-index*

How to measure the preference to marry same age partners irrespective of the supply of them? A possible method would be log-linear analysis (see Van Poppel, 1998, 91-96). The problem with log-linear analysis in this case is that age categories have to be grouped together to avoid cross tables (age of husband versus age of wife) with cells containing only a small number of observations. For the same reason, year by year analysis is almost impossible. Especially the first problem makes the analysis inaccurate. Marriages in which for instance the groom is two years older than his bride, can be classified as a same age marriage or as an older husband marriage, depending on the selection of the borders between the age groups.<sup>25</sup>

To avoid this problem, we will use another method. For the calculation of the preference for a specific type of marriage, we constructed the sam-, ohm-, and owm-index. These indices are constructed following these basic principles:

- we take the perspective of women entering the marriage market at a specific age in a specific year (we only select the brides between 18-35 years).<sup>26</sup>
- we estimate the age distribution of men on the marriage market by the proportion of men marrying on a specific age to the total number of men marrying in that year (see further).

For instance, all 25 years old women can choose from x per cent younger men, y per cent men of the same age category, and z per cent older men.

- if these women would not have a preference for a certain type of marriage (ohm, sam, owm), we expect that the number of marriages of a certain type is equal to these percentages. So, we expect x per cent of owm's, y per cent of sam's and z per cent of ohm's.

- these expected values are compared to the observed percentages of each marriage type in that year. For instance, we can find x+10 per cent marriages with younger men, y+5 per cent marriages with men of the same age category and z-15 per cent marriages with older men.

- the expected values are subtracted from the observed, for each age category of the bride.

- the indices are obtained by calculating a weighted average of these differences.

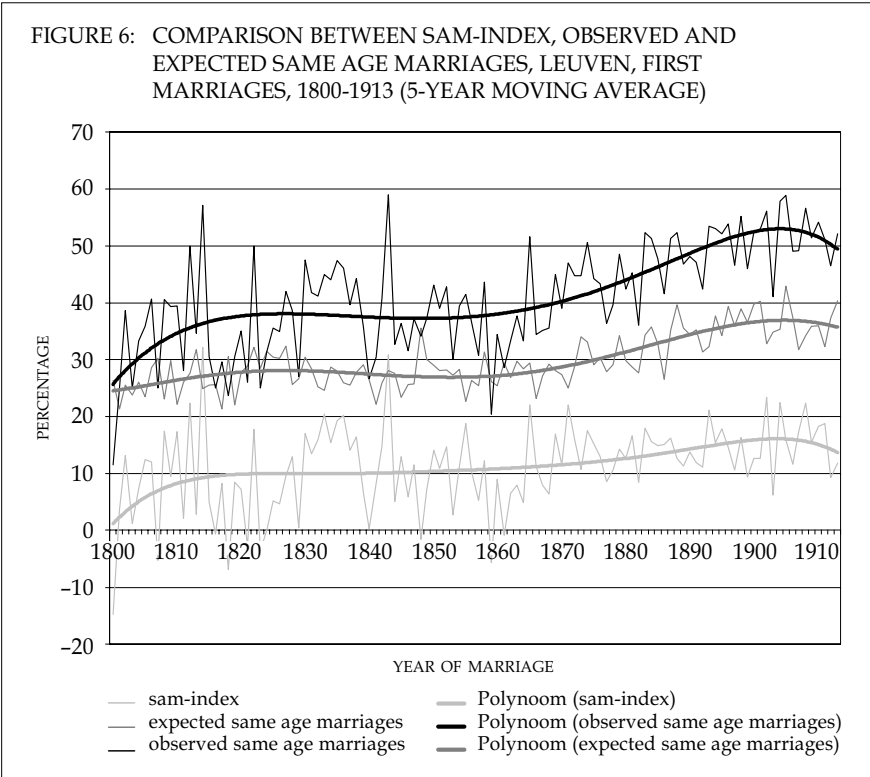
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<sup>25</sup>. Suppose the use of age groups 21-25 and 26-30. A marriage in which husband and wife are respectively 26 and 24, will be classified as an older husband marriage. A marriage in which husband and wife are respectively 24 and 22, will be classified as a same age marriage.

<sup>26</sup>. These women represent more than 98 per cent of the brides in first marriage.

- if the observed values differ from the expected (then the indices are not equal to zero), we can conclude that these types of marriages are not equally valued by the spouses.

Figure 6 shows the results of the sam-index for Leuven and compares it with the observed and the expected percentage of same age marriages. From this figure we can learn that the observed percentage of same age marriages increases in the second half of the nineteenth century. This increase is caused by both the increase of the availability of same age partners (expected sam curve) and the increase of the preference to marry age peers (sam-index curve). The increase of both the availability and the preference results in the increase of the observed percentage of same age marriages.



An important question is whether the age distribution of men at marriage is a good estimation of the number of potential marriage partners.<sup>27</sup> The group of marrying men does not represent the total group of potential marriage partners. Not all potential marriage partners do effectively marry, and it is not sure whether the men who do not marry have the same age distribution as those who do. The only possible alternative estimation would be to use the total number of unmarried men by age in a specific year. But not all these men are potential marriage partners ('marriage candidates'), simply because they do not (yet) want to marry, although they are unmarried ('marriageable'). Remember that we were forced to control for the available amount of partners because the age-at-marriage may have different determinants than the age gap between spouses. These determinants distinguish between those who are only marriageable and those who are also marriage candidates. Controlling for say 16-years old *unmarried* boys does not make sense if one wants to avoid the mixing up of available and unavailable men. For these 16-years old boys are very probably unavailable and therefore should not be taken into account as potential marriage partner.

As it is impossible to know the age distribution of those who want but do not marry, the only possible solution is trying to estimate the differences in age distribution between this group and the marrying men. A possible reason for differences between these two age distributions could be that the age distribution of the former is not correctly estimated because younger men have the possibility to wait a bit longer when available spouses do not fulfil their expectations. This would imply that in the younger age categories, the age distribution of the marrying men underestimates the number of men wanting to marry (but not marrying). To tackle this problem in a systematic way we developed some scenarios to explore the effect of the different age distribution of men wanting to marry but not marrying. In each scenario a different age distribution of men on the marriage market is used to calculate the indices.

Scenarios exploring the structural differences between the age distribution of marrying men and men not marrying (but wanting to marry):<sup>28</sup>

Scenario 1: more younger men available (15-25)

Scenario 2: more middle aged men available (26-40)

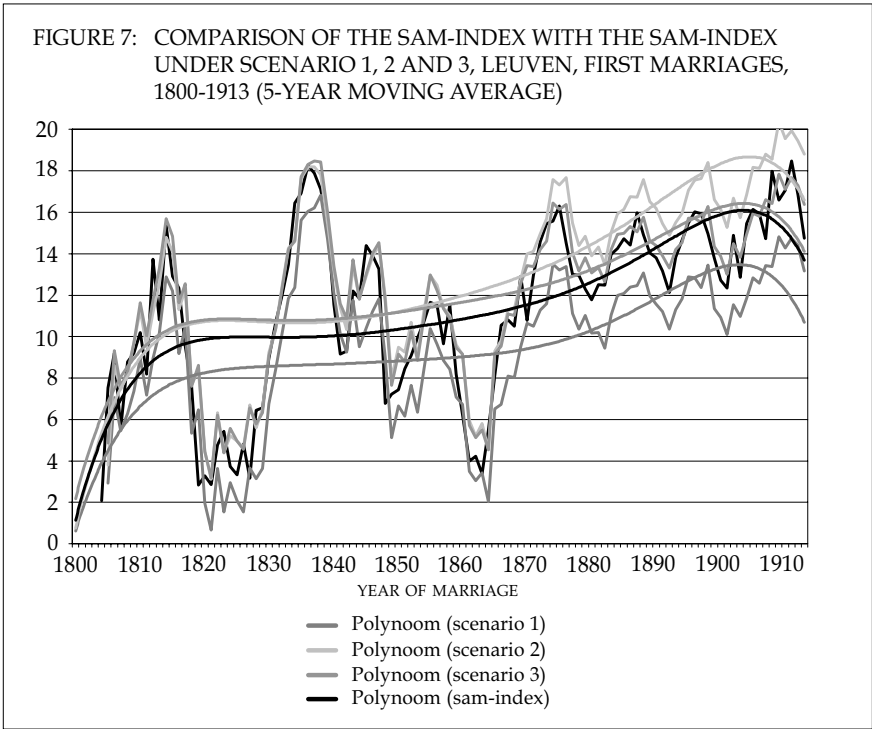
Scenario 3: more older men available (41+)

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<sup>27</sup>. This is also an (implicit) supposition when using log-linear analysis.

<sup>28</sup>. We multiply the number of men of these age categories with factor 1.5, which increases their relative proportion. It is a difficult job to estimate the factor to be used. The choice for 1.5 is a conservative one (the factor is high as it increases the proportion with 50 per cent).

Figure 7 shows the sam-index curves, which result from scenario 1 to 3. Testing these different scenarios, shows us that these do not influence the trends of the sam-index (but they do affect the level).<sup>29</sup>



To conclude, the use of the sam-index poses some rigid conditions. We suppose that the decline of the age-at-marriage is not influenced by romantic love and that the age distribution of the grooms may differ from the age distribution of marriage candidates. The sam-index rises even after applying these suppositions, this is a strong indication that there is a real increase in preference to marry age peers. But, at the same time, this is a conservative interpretation. The sam-, ohm- and owm-indices may lead to an underestimation of the importance of romantic love. If the decline of the age-at-marriage is linked with romantic impatience, than the declining dispersion of the male and female age-at-marriage in the lower age categories is the proof of an increasing

<sup>29.</sup> This is the consequence of the fact that we use the same scenario for each year.

preference for same age partners, and not just a market characteristic that has to be controlled for. The same underestimation may be present when estimating the preference for older husband marriages in the first half of the nineteenth century. If the higher male age-at-marriage is to some extent caused by a patriarchal value orientation, than the estimation of the preference for these marriages using the ohm-index will underestimate the real preference.

Thus, by controlling for the age distribution (as is done in log-linear analysis and our sam-, ohm- and owm-index analysis of age homogamy) we neglect the fact that the age distribution itself can be caused by the preference for a specific type of marriage. This problem is due to the fact that the characteristic we are measuring is not fixed, but changing along with the factors (age preference) we want to study. In the case of the analysis of homogamy by place of birth, this is not a problem as the place of birth cannot be changed in the light of the preference to marry someone with the same place of birth. This problem makes the interpretation of the level of age homogamy very difficult.

#### 2.4. Measuring the causes of age homogamy

The above mentioned preference for same age partners does not automatically mean that romantic partner selection is the cause of it. In the first section of this paper, we described four possible explanations for a high level of age homogamy: romantic love, egalitarian relations, instrumental reasons and the disciplining of unwed mothers. How can we know whether age homogamy is caused by romantic love or by (one of) the other alternative explanations?

The third option can be excluded by measuring age homogamy with the sam-index. Instrumental reasons for marrying a partner of a specific age will be related with the age distribution of the spouses. For instance, when working class men want to marry 'old' wives because of their prolonged saving activity, this would lead to a higher percentage of older wife marriages (and probably also of same age marriages). Measuring the 'preference' for older wife marriages with the owm-index will not necessarily show positive results. Indeed, older wife marriages do not necessarily occur because of a preference for older wives as such, that is, a preference for a specific age gap. These observed older woman marriages are the result of the preference for an 'old woman', and are the consequence of the (bridal) postponement of marriage. The preference for 'old' wives will for this reason only lead to a changing age distribution of female age-at-marriage, and not to a high score on the owm-index (which controls for this age distribution).



#### 2.4.1. *The influence of disciplining*

To evaluate the direct effect of disciplining on age homogamy, the first step is to compare the level of legitimisations at marriage of illegitimate children between same age and non-same age marriages, for each occupational group. We expect that there will be more legitimisations in same age marriages, as same age partners have a greater chance of being involved in pre-marital sexual relations (see section 1.2.1). Preliminary analyses show that this is clearly the case for the economic middle class and for the lower class groups (see Van de Putte, 2001). This means that if the pressure to marry the father/mother of one's children increases, this will lead to more same age marriages. Of course, the same mechanism can be at work for pregnant brides, but this phenomenon will stay unobserved, which can lead to neglecting of disciplining effects for specific social groups.<sup>30</sup> The importance of this factor will be tested in a logistic regression analysis (see section 2.5).

#### 2.4.2. *The influence of egalitarian relations*

The influence of egalitarian relations on the age gap between spouses is more difficult to distinguish from the influence of romantic love. We see two strategies which can give some indications. Firstly, the homogamy pattern of the observed percentages will be suggestive. A low level of older husband marriages shows the absence of a patriarchal culture, and hints at more egalitarian relations between husband and wife. In this case, however, romantic love cannot be excluded either. If this low level of older husband marriages is accompanied by a high level of older wife marriages, this suggests the absence of romantic partner selection. Older wife marriages are in the view of Shorter even more unromantic than older husband marriages (Shorter, 1975, 154-156).

Secondly, if the occupational status of the bride (working or not) is linked with age homogamy, that is if working brides have more chance to marry a same age partner than non-working brides, this supports the thesis that age homogamy is linked with the absence of male dominance. We will test this using logistic regression analysis (see section 2.5.). However, as for the lower classes the occupational status of the bride will rather be a constant than a variable (almost all brides of the working classes will probably work in the first

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<sup>30</sup>. Namely if pregnant brides are more typical for specific social groups.

half of the nineteenth century, see figure 2), this variable will not be meaningful for these classes.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.5. Logistic regression

In order to test the impact of the independent variables on age homogamy, we perform logistic regression analysis by occupational group. We try to estimate how the year of marriage (four periods), the occupational status of the bride (working versus non-working bride) and the legitimisation of children at marriage influence the chance to marry a same age partner (dependent variable). The occupational status of the bride indicates her relative power position. The legitimisation of children at marriage may be the result of the pressure to conform to the ideal family form. The year of marriage may reflect many factors, romantic love and the changing age distribution of spouses are two of them.

Codes:

Type of marriage	1 = same age marriage 0 = non-same age marriage
Year of marriage	Reference category = marriage between 1800 and 1825 Year of marriage_1 = marriage between 1826 and 1850 Year of marriage_2 = marriage between 1851 and 1875 Year of marriage_3 = marriage between 1876 and 1913
Working bride	1 = bride does work 0 = bride does not work
Legitimation of child(ren)	1 = at least 1 child is legitimised at marriage 0 = no children legitimised at marriage

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<sup>31</sup>. The problem is that romantic love and egalitarian relations are intertwined. Romantic love is more likely to flourish in a relationship between equals. *“The ‘companionate’ marriage is customarily seen as the hallmark of contemporary family life, the husband and wife being friends rather than superordinate and subordinate, sharing tasks and affection”* (Shorter, 1975, 227). In other words, egalitarianism seems to be a necessary condition for the development of romantic love. However, this of course does not mean that every egalitarian relationship is overwhelmed with romantic feelings between the partners. Also in an egalitarian relationship, partners can have a dominantly instrumental value for each other, although being equals.

## 2.6. Occupational groups

As an indicator of the socio-economic position we use the occupational titles used in the marriage certificates. A classification based on occupational titles has some limits (see for instance: De Belder, 1976; Vermeulen, 1985; Vanhaute, 1999; etc.), but permits the classification in meaningful social groups. We differentiate between three main groups:<sup>32</sup> the elite, the middle classes and the lower classes. The category 'elite' consists mainly of owners, rentiers, professionals, industrials, wholesale dealers, ... For the middle classes, we make a distinction between the economic middle class (shopkeepers, merchants, high skilled craftsmen,...) and the cultural middle class (for instance teachers, artists, clerks, state administration employees, bookkeepers, ...). The lower classes consist of low- and unskilled workers. A first subgroup is formed by the low-skilled workers who probably did not work in factories or large workshops<sup>33</sup> (for instance assistant carpenters, assistant painters, butchers). This group will be called 'low skilled manual workers'. Other subgroups are unskilled workers who probably did not work in factories (for instance street sweepers), low and unskilled workers who probably did (factory workers, workers in a railway workshop,...) – which we will call 'factory workers' – servants, minor tradesmen such as milkmen and others who do not belong to the elite and middle classes. We regrouped these lower class subgroups in two groups: low skilled manual workers and factory workers versus (other) lower classes.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>. We only used the occupational title of the husband for this classification.

<sup>33</sup>. A problem here is that the chance of being employed in a factory changes during the nineteenth century for some specific occupations. This problem is unsolvable. Interpretation should be careful.

<sup>34</sup>. The reason for this is that these groups have distinct age homogamy patterns – as we observed in preliminary analysis.

### 3. RESULTS

In this section we analyse the evolution of age homogamy by occupational group. Firstly, we analyse the observed percentages of the different types of marriage and the sam-index. Secondly, we perform a logistic regression analysis.

#### 3.1. Observed percentage of marriage types and sam-index by occupational group

Figure 8 shows the percentage of same age marriages by occupational group. The first conclusion is that almost every group – except the elite – has an increasing number of same age marriages in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the occupational categories have different proportions of same age marriages (table 2). It is not surprising that the elite has fewest same age marriages. High proportions of same age marriages are found for factory workers and low skilled manual workers and for both the cultural and the economic middle classes. The lower class couples show a rather low level of same age marriages. Especially important is the low level of same age marriages for this group in the first half of the nineteenth century (about 25 per cent). This observation suggests that the preference for same age partners was not strong enough to lead to a high number of same age marriages. The high proportion of older wife marriages – usually seen as less likely to be romantic – in the same period indicates the relatively strong position of women in these marriages. This is further illustrated by the low percentage of non-working brides in these groups – even in the second half of the nineteenth century this percentage is low (figure 2).

Figure 9 shows the sam-index by occupational group. The curves of figure 8 are to some degree reproduced by the curves of the sam-index of each group, although some interesting differences appear. It is mainly the cultural middle classes who show the strongest *increase* in preference to marry same age marriages (see also table 1). For the economic middle class, the increase of the preference for same age partners is far more modest. In the two lower class subgroups there was also a modest increase in preference to marry same age partners in the second half of the nineteenth century. The increase for both groups was partly caused by the increasing number of legitimisations of children at marriage, as in these marriages more same age partners were involved (see Van de Putte, 2001).

Also important is that the sam-index has a high *level* for the economic middle class and the lower classes (both subgroups) in the first half of the nineteenth century. The cultural middle class, in this sense, only catches up with the

other classes. Interpreting this high level of same age marriages in the first half of the nineteenth century is a delicate task. The question is whether this can be interpreted as the consequence of an early rise of romantic partner selection.

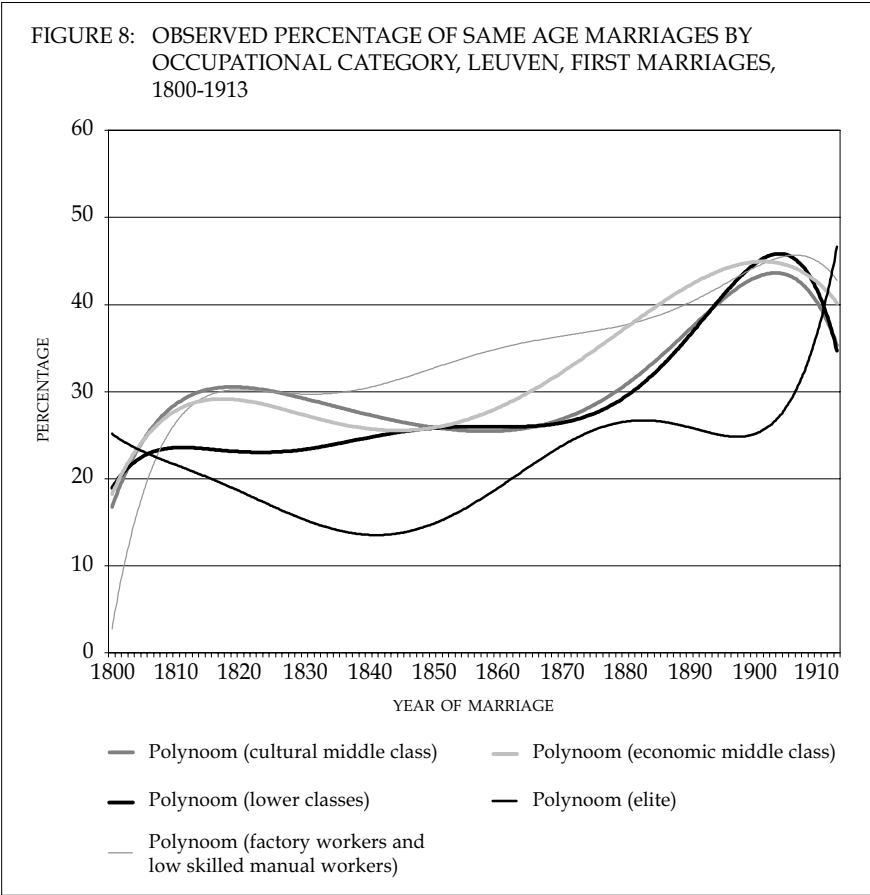


FIGURE 9: SAM-INDEX BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY, LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES, 1800-1913

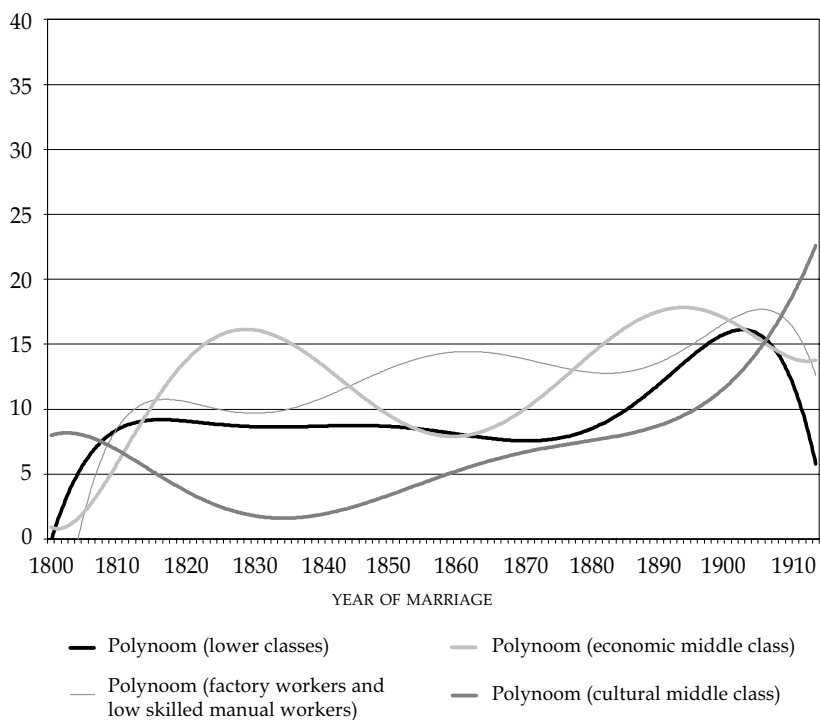


TABLE 1 THE INCREASE OF THE SAM-INDEX BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY

	<i>cultural middle class</i>	<i>economic middle class</i>	<i>lower classes</i>	<i>factory workers and low skilled manual workers</i>
weighed average of sam-index				
1800-1833	0.9	11.3	5.4	7.4
1834-1866	7.3	12.6	7.8	12.7
1867-1913	10.7	13.6	10.3	14.6
increase of sam-index (period 3 versus period 1)				
Factor	12.4	1.2	1.9	2.0
Additive increase	9.9	2.3	4.9	7.1

TABLE 2 OBSERVED PERCENTAGES OF OWM, SAM AND OHM BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY, LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES			
<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>owm</i>	<i>sam</i>	<i>ohm</i>
elite	18.2	24.4	57.4
cultural middle class	18.7	33.8	47.5
economic middle class	23.5	36.0	40.5
lower classes	28.1	29.8	42.1
low skilled manual workers and factory workers	22.5	36.6	40.9
Total number of observations	1733	2495	3251

### 3.2. Logistic regression analysis

The increase of the preference to marry age peers of the *cultural middle class* cannot be explained by the increase of the economic independency of the brides (female power path), as these middle class women rarely have an occupation (see figure 2). This is also suggested by the low number of older wife marriages (table 2). Furthermore, legitimisation is also no cause of the increase in same age marriages. For the cultural middle class, there are not more legitimisations in same age marriages than in other marriages (Van de Putte, 2001). It seems that the only reason for this increase in same age marriages is romantic love. This view is confirmed by the logistic regression analysis (table 3). Only the period of marriage has a significant relation with same age marriages. Both the occupational status of the bride as the legitimisation are no major explanations for the rise of the same age marriages. Also the coincidence of the timing of the change of the cultural indicators (see figure 1 and 2) and the timing of the increase of the sam-index is revealing. It is only in the period of cultural change that the sam-index rises.

For the *economic middle class*, the results of the logistic regression analysis are revealing (table 4). Overall there is no significant relation between legitimisation and same age marriages. But the occupational status of the bride is significantly related to the type of marriage. Working brides have more chance to marry same age partners. This suggests that the high sam-index of the economic middle class is probably related to the absence of a patriarchal value orientation.

The results of the logistic regression analysis for the *lower classes* (total group) show that there is a significant relation between the legitimisation of children at marriage and same age marriages, suggesting the effect of disciplining on age homogamy. This effect is not present for the first three decades of the

nineteenth century (results not shown). Furthermore, working brides have a better chance to marry a same age partner, although this effect is only significant at the 0.10-level.

How can we interpret the age homogamy pattern of the low skilled manual workers and the factory workers? The level of observed same age marriages is high, but the level of the sam-index is lower than the index of the economic middle class. This means that this lower class subgroup is not the pioneer of age homogamy. Furthermore, the disciplining effect is already working in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century and the proportion of non-working brides is very low, which suggest the importance of egalitarian relations (figure 2, see also table 5). However, only using these results, it cannot be excluded that the high level of same age marriages is caused by romantic love as early as the first decades of the nineteenth century.

TABLE 3    LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF THE CHANCE OF MARRYING A SAME AGE PARTNER, CULTURAL MIDDLE CLASS, LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES (N = 663) <sup>35</sup>							
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Parameter DF</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Wald Chi- Square</i>	<i>Pr &gt;Chi- Square</i>	<i>Standardized Estimate</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Working bride	1	0.2122	0.1784	1.4146	0.2343	0.0000	1.2363
Legitimation of child(ren)	1	-0.0791	0.2614	0.0917	0.7621	0.0000	0.9239
Year of marriage	3			12.4204	<b>0.0061</b>	0.0870	
Year of marriage_1	1	0.1027	0.3050	0.1134	0.7363	0.0000	1.1082
Year of marriage_2	1	0.0711	0.3017	0.0556	0.8136	0.0000	1.0737
Year of marriage_3	1	0.6703	0.2542	6.9534	<b>0.0084</b>	0.0764	1.9548
Constant	1	-1.1368	0.2486	21.2119	0.0000		

<sup>35</sup>. Codes for the tables 3-5, see section 2.5. Limiting the time period to the period 1851-1913, the same results appear for the three social groups. Testing for collinearity did not indicate problems.



TABLE 4 LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF THE CHANCE OF MARRYING A SAME AGE PARTNER, ECONOMIC MIDDLE CLASS, LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES (N = 1133)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Parameter Estimate</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Wald Chi-Square</i>	<i>Pr &gt; Chi-Square</i>	<i>Standardized Estimate</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Working bride	1	0.2888	0.1338	4.6627	<b>0.0308</b>	0.0424	1.3349
Legitimation of child(ren)	1	0.2329	0.1491	2.4400	0.1183	0.0172	1.2623
Year of marriage	3			17.1017	<b>0.0007</b>	0.0866	
Year of marriage_1	1	-0.0138	0.2414	0.0033	0.9544	0.0000	0.9863
Year of marriage_2	1	0.0485	0.2220	0.0477	0.8272	0.0000	1.0497
Year of marriage_3	1	0.5464	0.1874	8.4983	<b>0.0036</b>	0.0662	1.7270
Constant	1	-1.1166	0.1895	34.7042	0.0000		

TABLE 5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF THE CHANCE OF MARRYING A SAME AGE PARTNER, LOWER CLASSES (TOTAL GROUP), LEUVEN, FIRST MARRIAGES (N = 4812)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Parameter Estimate</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Wald Chi-Square</i>	<i>Pr &gt; Chi-Square</i>	<i>Standardized Estimate</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Working bride	1	0.1326	0.0823	2.5950	0.1072	0.0098	1.1418
Legitimation of child(ren)	1	0.2300	0.0677	11.5329	<b>0.0007</b>	0.0393	1.2586
Year of marriage	3			75.0114	<b>0.0000</b>	0.1056	
Year of marriage_1	1	0.2457	0.1141	4.6401	<b>0.0312</b>	0.0207	1.2785
Year of marriage_2	1	0.2835	0.1121	6.3886	<b>0.0115</b>	0.0266	1.3277
Year of marriage_3	1	0.7170	0.0999	51.4965	<b>0.0000</b>	0.0894	2.0483
Constant	1	-1.2669	0.1069	140.3815	0.0000		

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the second half of the nineteenth century there are clear signs of cultural change in Leuven. Marriage becomes a family centred ceremony, more illegitimate children are legitimised at marriage, less illegitimate children are born and husbands are more able to keep their wives at home. The percentage of same age marriages increases in the second half of the nineteenth century. For an important part, this increasing age homogamy can be described as the mechanical effect of the parallel decline in the age-at-marriage. However, the preference to marry same age partners did also rise, although there are important differences according to social groups. For the cultural middle class, the preference for a same age partner increased in the second half of the nineteenth century. Our analysis suggests the importance of romantic love as a

cause of this increase. For the economic middle class, the lower class group, the factory workers and the low skilled manual workers, the *increase* in preference for same age partners was far more modest. However, there was also cultural change in these groups. The increasing mean number of kin at the marriage ceremony suggests this.

As the lower class group (to a lesser degree), the factory workers and low skilled manual workers and the economic middle class groups do show a preference for same age marriages in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Shorter hypotheses cannot be discarded in a formal manner. It cannot be excluded that in these groups romantic partner selection was present from the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, there are some indications – apart from the theoretical reasons mentioned earlier – which undermine the validity of this interpretation. Firstly, the high level of the sam-index does not correspond to the other indicators of cultural change, which suggests the second half of the nineteenth century as the key period for change (see figure 1 and 2).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, there are competing explanations. For the lower class group, the observed percentage of same age marriages in the first half of the nineteenth century is rather moderate, not exceeding 30 per cent. This fact, together with the relatively high percentage of older wife marriages (more than 30 per cent)<sup>37</sup> suggest the importance of the female power road towards age homogamy. The high level of same age marriages of the economic middle class, may be linked to the relatively strong position of wives in these groups, as indicated by the logistic regression analysis. The position of the factory workers and low skilled manual workers is even more difficult to interpret, as for this group the only proof of the relatively strong position of wives is the low level of non-working brides. Finally, another indicator of romantic love points at its relative unimportance for these groups compared to the cultural middle class. The period between the death of the wife and the remarriage of the widower – which we interpret as the length of the mourning period – is shorter for the lower class group, the factory workers, the low skilled manual workers and the economic middle class compared to the cultural middle class (Van de Putte, 2001).

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<sup>36</sup>. In the first section we argued that the romanticisation of family life does not necessarily mean that partner selection too has already become romantic, but the other way around – romantic partner selection which precedes romanticisation of family life – seems less likely.

<sup>37</sup>. The high figures on the sam-index for the first half of the nineteenth century show that there is a preference for same age partners, only after controlling for the age distribution of the spouses. This means that this preference is not a priority for partner selection.

The elite shows a consistent score on most indicators of cultural change. Elite spouses less frequently have an occupation and the mean number of kin present at the marriage ceremony is high. However, these aspects are realised in the same period as in which the continuity of the dominance of older husband marriages is realised. It is possible that this is the illustration of the emergence of what we nowadays call a conservative model of marriage life, which has mixed the patriarchal tradition with new family centred values. However, it is also possible that for the elite same age marriages are insufficient as an indicator of love-match-marriages. The marriage market of the elite may have been too limited to realize a decline of same age marriages. Furthermore, it is also unlikely that the concept of 'age peer' has the same meaning for elite as for middle or lower classes, as the elite youth may have been raised in other socialising structures which are not (or less) rigidly organised by age. Whether this is correct or not, it is meaningful that the difficulty of marrying a same age partner only leads to a higher number of older husband marriages, and not of older women marriages.

A point of discussion which is not analysed in this paper concerns the question whether the increasing power of romantic love was strong enough to overrule other mate selection strategies. In its 'pure' form, romantic love ought not to be preoccupied with socio-economic boundaries. Cupid does not possess a tele-conducted cruise missile seeking for the right money-matched aim. A weaker form of romantic love could mean that it is only within the traditional socio-economic boundaries that its influence increases. In other words, in nineteenth century Leuven spouses were allowed – more than they used to be – to marry age peers, but possibly only when socio-economic borders were respected.

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# **Romantische liefde en huwelijk. Een onderzoek naar leeftijdshomogamie in Leuven tijdens de 19de eeuw**

BART VAN DE PUTTE  
KOEN MATTHIJS

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## **SAMENVATTING**

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We analyseren de evolutie van leeftijdshomogamie en het verband ervan met het belang van de romantische liefde aan de hand van de huwelijken voltrokken in het negentiende-eeuwse Leuven (N = 7.510). De verschillen naar socio-economische status krijgen een bijzondere aandacht.

Er zijn vele tekenen van culturele veranderingen die vooral in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw een impact hadden op het huwelijk en het huwelijksleven. Centraal hierbij staat de romantisering van het huwelijksleven en de groei van de burgerlijke moraal. Deze veranderingen hebben te maken met bijvoorbeeld de groei van de 'huiselijkheid', het terugtrekken van de echtgenote in de privé levenssfeer, het toenemend belang van 'familie' en het verminderd belang van het gemeenschapsleven. Ook in Leuven zijn in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw vergelijkbare evoluties op te meten. Een ander aspect van het huwelijk waarvan men vermoedt dat het wijzigde, is de partnerkeuze. De idee van de groeiende invloed van de romantische liefde op de partnerkeuze is vooral verbonden met de theorieën van Shorter. Deze auteur stelt dat de romantisering zorgde voor veranderingen in het homogamiepatroon, en dan vooral voor een toename van de leeftijdshomogamie.

De analyse van leeftijdshomogamie is allesbehalve eenvoudig en roept dan ook enkele belangrijke theoretische en methodologische vraagstukken op. Deze worden uitgebreid in dit artikel behandeld. Ten eerste kan de theorie van Shorter ernstig bekritiseerd worden. Vooral zijn nadruk op de vroege 'doorbraak' van de romantische liefde (vroeg in de negentiende eeuw, of zelfs vroeger) bij de lagere klassen wordt in vraag gesteld. Ten tweede proberen we alternatieve verklaringen in te schatten voor de toename van leeftijdshomogamie (de disciplinerende van ongehuwde moeders, egalitaire man-vrouw relaties, instrumentele partnerkeuze). Dit probleem analyseren we aan de hand van een logistische regressie-analyse en door het meten van diverse culturele indicatoren (b.v. het percentage niet-werkende bruiden). Ten derde is de mogelijke invloed van de historische daling van de eerste huwelijksleeftijd op leeftijdshomogamie een hardnekkig methodologisch probleem. Deze daling gaat gepaard met een kleinere spreiding van de huwelijksleeftijd van de huwenden, wat het huwen met een partner van gelijke leeftijd eenvoudiger maakt. Om dit probleem op te lossen, bepalen we de voorkeur om met een partner van gelijke leeftijd te trouwen door het gebruik van een index (de

sam-index) die rekening houdt met het aantal potentiële partners van gelijke leeftijd.

De analyse gaf de volgende resultaten. Het percentage huwelijken tussen partners van gelijke leeftijd neemt toe in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. Voor een belangrijk deel kan deze toename van leeftijdshomogamie gezien worden als het mechanisch gevolg van de daling van de eerste huwelijksleeftijd. Maar, via het gebruik van de sam-index weten we dat ook de voorkeur om met leeftijdsgenoten te huwen daadwerkelijk toenam. Belangrijk is wel dat er sterke verschillen zijn naar socio-economische status van de huwendes. Voor de culturele middenklasse steeg de voorkeur voor een partner van gelijke leeftijd in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw tamelijk sterk. Onze analyse suggereert het belang van de romantische liefde als verklaring hiervoor. Een ander beeld duikt op bij de elite. De elite laat een consistente score op allerlei indicatoren van culturele verandering optekenen. Zo hadden elite-bruiden minder dikwijls een job en het aantal familieleden dat als huwelijksgetuige optrad, kwam in de tweede helft van de 19de eeuw relatief hoog te liggen. Doch, deze veranderingen gingen gepaard met een blijvend sterk aandeel van huwelijken met een oudere mannelijke partner. Het is mogelijk dat deze ontwikkelingen een illustratie zijn van het verschijnen van hetgeen we nu een 'conservatief huwelijksleven' noemen, welke een samengaan is van een patriarchale traditie met nieuwe, familiegerichte waarden.

De resultaten voor de andere groepen zijn minder éénduidig te interpreteren. Vergelijken met de culturele middenklasse was voor de economische middenklasse en de lagere klassen de stijging van de voorkeur voor een huwelijkspartner van gelijke leeftijd veel minder sterk. Maar ook voor deze groepen zijn er tekenen van culturele verandering. Dit blijkt bijvoorbeeld uit de toename van het aantal familieleden dat optrad als huwelijksgetuige. Verder is de voorkeur voor een huwelijkspartner van gelijke leeftijd bij deze groepen (hoewel er ook binnen deze groep aanzienlijke verschillen zijn) reeds tamelijk hoog vanaf het begin van de negentiende eeuw. De stelling van Shorter kan hierdoor niet formeel worden ontkracht. Het is niet uitgesloten dat voor deze groepen romantische partnerselectie een belangrijk fenomeen was in het begin van de negentiende eeuw. Er zijn echter indicaties die hier tegen ingaan. Wellicht is het meest overtuigende argument hierbij dat een andere indicator van romantische liefde wijst op haar afwezigheid bij deze groepen in vergelijking tot de culturele middenklasse. Bij hertrouwen zien we dat de periode tussen het overlijden van de echtgenote en het hertrouwen van de weduwnaar – welke we interpreteren als de rouwperiode – korter is voor de economische middenklasse en de lagere klassen dan voor de culturele middenklasse.

## **Amour romantique et mariage. Une étude de l'homogamie d'âge à Louvain au XIXe siècle**

BART VAN DE PUTTE  
KOEN MATTHIJS

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### RÉSUMÉ

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Nous analysons l'évolution de l'homogamie d'âge et son rapport avec l'importance de l'amour romantique à partir des mariages conclus à Louvain pendant le XIXe siècle (N=7.510). Nous nous attachons tout spécialement aux différences inhérentes au niveau socio-économique.

Nous notons plusieurs modifications culturelles qui influencent le mariage et la vie conjugale, surtout pendant la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. La romantisation de la vie conjugale et la croissance de la moralité publique en sont les causes principales. Ces transformations sont indiquées, par exemple, par la croissance de 'l'attachement au foyer', le fait que l'épouse se replie dans la vie privée, l'importance croissante de la 'famille' et la moindre importance accordée à l'activité sociale. A Louvain comme ailleurs, cette évolution se dessine pendant la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. Le choix du partenaire est un autre aspect du mariage qui semble se modifier. L'idée de l'importance croissante de l'amour romantique est surtout liée aux théories de Shorter, qui affirme que la romantisation a modifié le modèle de l'homogamie d'âge.

L'analyse de l'homogamie d'âge n'est pas du tout simple et soulève une série importante de questions théoriques et méthodologiques. Celles-ci sont amplement traitées dans cet article. En premier lieu, la théorie de Shorter peut être sujette à des critiques importantes. En particulier, la percée rapide de l'amour romantique (au début du XIXe siècle et même plus tôt) dans les classes sociales inférieures est soumise à caution. En deuxième lieu, nous essayons d'évaluer quelles raisons pourraient expliquer la croissance de l'homogamie d'âge (la "disciplination" de la mère célibataire, les relations d'égal à égal entre homme et femme,...). Nous analysons ce problème à l'aide d'une analyse régressive logistique et en mesurant différents indicateurs culturels (par exemple, le pourcentage d'épouses sans emploi). En troisième lieu, l'influence possible de la diminution historique de l'âge au premier mariage sur l'homogamie d'âge pose un sérieux problème méthodologique. Cette diminution est liée à une plus petite distribution d'âge (des époux), ce qui facilite le mariage avec un partenaire du même âge. Pour résoudre ce problème, nous déterminons la préférence pour un partenaire du même âge en utilisant un index (l'index sam) qui tient compte du potentiel existant de partenaires du même âge.

Cette analyse a conduit aux constats suivants. Le pourcentage de mariages entre partenaires du même âge augmente dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. Une part importante de cette croissance de l'homogamie d'âge est la



suite mécanique de la diminution de l'âge au premier mariage. Mais par l'usage de l'index *sam*, nous savons que la préférence pour un partenaire du même âge s'est effectivement accrue. Des différences importantes existent selon la catégorie socio-économique des époux. Dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle, dans la classe culturelle moyenne, la préférence pour un partenaire du même âge a connu une croissance relativement forte. Notre analyse semble indiquer que l'amour romantique en serait la cause. Une autre image surgit parmi l'élite, où plusieurs indicateurs d'évolution culturelle se dessinent. Les épouses de l'élite ont moins souvent un emploi et le nombre de membres de la famille qui interviennent comme témoin au mariage est relativement élevé dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. Mais ces modifications vont de pair avec une part importante de mariages avec un partenaire plus âgé. Ces évolutions sont peut-être une illustration de l'apparition de ce que nous appelons actuellement 'une vie conjugale conservatrice' qui est le résultat de la mise en commun d'une tradition patriarcale et de nouvelles valeurs familiales.

Les résultats des autres groupes sont moins univoques. Dans la classe économique moyenne et les classes inférieures, la préférence pour un partenaire conjugal du même âge évolue à la hausse de manière moins nette que dans la classe culturelle moyenne. Mais nous constatons néanmoins dans cette population des signes de modifications culturelles. Notamment, un nombre croissant de membres de la famille interviennent comme témoins au mariage. Il s'avère ensuite que la préférence pour un conjoint du même âge dans ces groupes (bien qu'il y ait des différences importantes dans ce groupe) est déjà relativement élevée au début du XIXe siècle. De ce fait, la thèse de Shorter ne peut être formellement remise en question: nous ne pouvons pas exclure que, pour cette population, le choix romantique d'un partenaire était un aspect important au début du XIXe siècle. Mais d'autres éléments la contredisent. L'argument le plus convaincant est probablement que parmi les mariages en seconde noce, la période entre le décès de l'épouse et le remariage du veuf – ce que nous interprétons comme période de deuil – est plus courte parmi la classe économique moyenne et les classes inférieures que parmi la classe culturelle moyenne.

